



Liturgy Catechesis

Catholic Liturgy and Song

God has bestowed upon his people the gift of song. Indeed, God, the giver of song, is present whenever his people sing his praises. Holy Mother Church clearly affirms the role within worship of the entire liturgical assembly (bishop, priest, deacon, ministers of the Word, music leaders, choir, EMHCs, and the congregation). Full, conscious, and active participation by all the people is the aim to be considered before all else, for it is the primary and indispensable source from which the faithful are to derive the true Christian spirit. (STL: 1, 10, 11)

Participation in the Sacred Liturgy is **both** “*internal*” (a sense of the faithful joined in prayerful mind and heart; cooperating with the heavenly grace) and “*external*” (by our expression of actions, gestures, bodily attitudes, acclamations, responses, and singing). However, sometimes our voices do not correspond to the convictions of our hearts. At times, we are distracted or preoccupied by the cares of the secular world. But Christ always invites us to enter into sing, to rise above our own preoccupations, and to give our entire selves to the hymn of His Pascal Sacrifice for the honor and glory of the Most Blessed Trinity. (STL: 12, 13, 14)

Equally, Catholic education institutions (including our Ave Maria Catholic School) have a special obligation toward music and Sacred Liturgy. Catholic schools are called to foster the joy of singing and making music, to cultivate the repertoire of sacred music inherited from the past ... and to celebrate the Sacred Liturgy worthily. (STL: 54)

Liturgical music must always be chosen and sung “with due consideration for the culture of the people and abilities of each liturgical assembly.” Immigrants should be welcomed and should be provided with the resources they need to worship in their own language. ... [A]s the generation of an immigrant group comes to maturity in the worshipping [parish] assembly, bilingual (native language and English) resources and songs are needed to promote the participation of the multicultural and multigenerational assembly. As [parishes] become increasingly diverse, [they] are encouraged to develop bicultural or multicultural celebrations from time-to-time that reflect the changing face of the Church in America. ... Liturgical music today must reflect the multicultural diversity and intercultural relationships of the members of the gathered liturgical assembly. (STL: 58, 59, 60)

During our recent parish survey, many parishioners commented that they thought there was “too much music” in the Ave Maria Parish liturgies. Understanding that the Church is always at prayer, and that authentic sacred music supports the Church’s prayer, as the parish’s pastoral leadership, we would like to take this opportunity to catechize and inform the faithful, so that we may collectively see where, when, and why music is such an integral part of our parish liturgical celebrations and in accordance with which Church norm, practice or directive.

What Parts Do We Sing?

- a. *Dialogues and Acclamations:* The acclamations of the Eucharistic Liturgy include: the Gospel Acclamation, the *Sanctus*, the Memorial Acclamation, and the Great Amen. Of particular note here, the priest presider and/or deacon are also strongly encouraged to sign their varied parts of the Mass (e.g., Eucharistic prayer, greetings, etc), within their musical abilities and skills. (STL: 115a)
- b. *Antiphons and Psalms:* The psalms are poems of praise that are meant, whenever possible, to be sung. The Entrance and Communion chants with their psalm verses serve to accompany the two most important processions of the Mass; the entrance procession, by which the Mass begins, and the Communion procession, by which the faithful approach the altar to receive Holy Communion. Participation in song on the part of the assembly is commended during both of these important processions, as the People of God, gather at the beginning of the Mass and as the faithful approach the holy altar to receive the Body and Blood of Christ. (STL: 115b; GIRM 61)
- c. *Refrains and Repeated Responses:* These include the *Kyrie*, *Angus Dei*, and *Gloria* of the Mass, the response to the Prayer of the Faithful at Mass; and the Litany of the Saints in various rites. (STL: 115c; GIRM 52)
- d. *Hymns:* Church legislation today permits as an option the use of vernacular hymns (popular/ contemporary)—along with congregational hymns, at the Entrance, Preparation/Presentation of the Gifts, Communion, and Recessional. Because the Communion chant expresses the unity of those processing and receiving the Holy Sacrament, communal singing is commendable. The singing of the people should be preeminent. (STL: 115d)
- e. *Sacred Silence:* Music arises out of silence and returns to silence. God is revealed both in the beauty of song and in the power of silence. The Sacred Liturgy has its rhythm of texts, actions, songs, and silence. Silence in the Liturgy, allows the community to reflect on what it has heard and experienced, and to open its heart to the mystery celebrated. The importance of silence in the Liturgy cannot be overemphasized. (STL: 118; GIRM 147)

In conclusion, "... joy in the Lord and contact with His presence in the liturgy has an inexhaustible power of inspiration. ... Man is always looking for the right way of honoring God, for a form of prayer and common worship that pleases God and is appropriate to his nature" (Ratzinger, 156, 159). May we continue to experience the fullness of the Holy Spirit in our parish liturgies, as we long to be in the presence of Our Heavenly Father, and worthily receive the very Body and Blood of His Son, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

All glory, praise, and honor be the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. (Amen.)

SR: *Sacrasanctum Concilium* (Constitution of the Sacred Liturgy); *Musicam Sacram* (Instruction on Music in the Liturgy); General Instruction to the Roman Missal (GIRM); Sing to the Lord (STL): Music in Divine Worship; and *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger (now Pope Benedict XVI).